E 312
.5
.U5
Copy 1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 011 838 153 1

41ST CONGRESS, 2d Session. } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. { REPORT No. 36.

E 312
.5
.U5
Copy 1

MOUNT VERNON RELICS.

MARCH 17, 1870.—Ordered to be printed and recommitted to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Mr. KERR, from the Committee on the Judiciary, made the following

REPORT.

The Committee on the Judiciary, to whom was referred the resolution of the House adopted April 5, 1869, directing inquiry concerning the proper disposition to be made of the "Mount Vernon relics," report:

In order to obtain the most reliable information on the subject so referred to the committee, an inquiry was addressed to the Adjutant General of the Army for all evidence to be found in the records of the War Department concerning the "Mount Vernon relics," and in answer thereto the committee are supplied with the following correspondence:

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
Washington, January 29, 1870.

SIR: In reply to your inquiry of the 25th instant, relative to certain relics formerly in the possession of Mrs. Mary Custis Lee, and now supposed to be in the possession of the government, I have the honor to transmit herewith copies of all the correspondence bearing upon the matter which the records of this office afford.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

E. D. TOWNSEND,
Adjutant General.

Hon. M. C. KERR,
Member of Congress, Washington, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
February 8, 1862.

SIR: Agreeably to the request of your note of the 30th ultimo, I return herewith a letter of General McDowell addressed to you on the 7th ultimo, in relation to the "Mount Vernon relics" at Arlington House, which was received here with your communication of the 13th ultimo.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

CALEB B. SMITH, *Secretary.*

Brigadier General S. WILLIAMS,
Assistant Adjutant General,
Headquarters Army of the Potomac, Washington, D. C.

HEADQUARTERS DIVISION,
Arlington, Virginia, January 7, 1862.

GENERAL: Shortly after coming into the command of the then department Northeast Virginia, with my headquarters at this place, I received a letter from Mrs. R. E. Lee, daughter of the former proprietor of this house, and from an expression in it I received the impression that all of the Mount Vernon relics which had been deposited here had been removed at the time of her leaving, and I remained under this belief till a few days since.

On my coming here I found the house occupied for public purposes, and for reasons not necessary to go into at this time I refrained from occupying it personally, but encamped near it; and during the several times I have been here I have continued in camp, until a very recent period, when an injury compelled me to seek quarters indoors.

A short time ago an old negro woman belonging to the estate came to tell me she had been intrusted by her mistress with the key of one of the cellar rooms, and that some time back this room had been broken into and was now open, and as it contained china which was exposed, the boxes in which it had been packed having been broken open, she wished to be relieved of the responsibility of having the key. I had the door closed, and also that of the garret, which I found had been broken open.

Last week the Hon. Caleb Lyons, being here on a visit and learning of the these facts, expressed a wish to see this china, as having frequently been a guest of Mr. Custis he was well acquainted with everything in his possession which had belonged to General Washington.

His inspection resulted in the discovery that the cellar room contained, first, the remains of a set of china which had been presented by the Society of Cincinnati to General Washington, which will be found described and drawn page 240, "Mount Vernon and its Associations, by Benson J. Lossing."

Second. Two pieces of a set of china presented by the officers of the French army to Mrs. Washington, which will be found described and drawn on page 241, same work.

Third. Two vases presented to General Washington by Mr. Vaughn, which will be found described and drawn pages 174, 175, same work.

General Washington's punch bowl, with the picture of a ship in it, described and drawn page 303 same work, was here but a short time before, (as I am informed by those who saw it in the cellar,) but has been stolen. There is no question as to the genuineness of these relics. Seeing that I had been mistaken in the belief that there were no relics of Washington at Arlington. I called on the old servants and have ascertained that beside those before mentioned there are here the following articles:

First. General Washington's tea table, described page 303 of Lossing's work.

Second. General Washington's tent, described page 126, same work.

Third. Two gilt ornaments for candelabras, described page 301, same work.

There are also some pieces of furniture brought here from Mount Vernon, but whether they belong to General Washington or the Custis family is not clear.

I have during the times I have been here endeavored to take the greatest care of this house and its furniture, and of the grounds, &c., but from what has been done and what will be done in the changes to take place in the different persons who may occupy this house with their staff, servants, followers, &c., and the crowd of curiosity-seekers constantly coming here, this place is not a safe one for the preservation of anything that is known to have an historical interest small or great.

There is also in the garret a quantity of papers of the Custis family, which are supposed to contain many of those of Washington, Lafayette, &c. These are not safe from pilfering hands. None of these can now be sent to the family to whom they belong.

They are interesting to a large class both North and South, and I feel I should not be fully acquitted of discharging my duty if I do not bring the subject to the attention of superior authority, that some steps may be taken in the matter.

It has been suggested that they should be placed in the Patent Office or the Smithsonian Institute, and Major L. Williams, Sixth Cavalry, whose family is in some way connected with that of the proprietors, suggests to me that his aunt in Georgetown will gladly take charge of them. I am interested only in their preservation, and shall gladly follow any instructions concerning them the major general commanding may be pleased to order or indicate.

I inclose a list of the china referred to, and have the honor to be, very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

IRVIN McDOWELL,
Brigadier General Commanding Division.

Brigadier General S. WILLIAMS,
Assistant Adjutant General,
Headquarters Army Potomac, Washington, D. C.

CINCINNATI CHINA.

13 dining plates and soup plates.
1 punch bowl (broken.)
7 imperfect pieces.
3 salad bowls.
3 soup tureens.
5 sauce bowls.

3 fish drainers.
2 pieces of glass.
10 custard cup covers.
2 little platters.

MARTHA WASHINGTON CHINA.

1 broken plate.
1 sugar bowl.

OTHER CHINA.

2 vases, (porcelain.)

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,
January 13, 1862.

SIR: I have the honor to present to your consideration the inclosed letter from Brigadier General Irvin McDowell, concerning some relics of General Washington's property, recently discovered by him in the Arlington House, a list of which accompanies the letter.

It is evident that these articles, of a national and historical value, should have greater care and safer keeping than will be possible at Arlington certainly for a long time to come, and I would respectfully beg leave to inquire whether the custodian of the Washington relics, in the national Patent Office, is not the most fitting person to whose care these articles, of like nature and value, can be committed.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

S. WILLIAMS,
Assistant Adjutant General.

Hon. C. B. SMITH,
Secretary of the Interior.

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,
January 13, 1862.

GENERAL: Your communication in reference to the Washington relics discovered in Arlington House has been referred to Hon. C. B. Smith, Secretary of the Interior, who has kindly consented that they may be placed for safe keeping in the national Patent Office in this city, with other articles preserved there formerly belonging to General Washington. You will, therefore, take the necessary steps to have them sent there.

It has been suggested that in prosecuting further search for such relics on the Arlington estate, Hon. Caleb Lyon, having been on terms of intimate friendship with the family of Mr. Custis, and being familiar with the locality, may prove a valuable assistant.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

S. WILLIAMS,
Assistant Adjutant General.

Brigadier General IRVIN MCDOWELL,
Commanding Division.

[Extract from Letters Received Book, Army of the Potomac.]

JANUARY 16, 1862.

In relation to the Washington relics recently discovered at the Arlington House; proposes to have them removed to the Patent Office.

Papers not on file with records Army of the Potomac.

JANUARY 17, 1862.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
C. B. SMITH, *Secretary.*

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,
January 17, 1862.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated the 16th instant, kindly consenting that the Washington relics, discovered at Arlington House, may be

placed for safe-keeping in the cases in the public saloon of the Patent Office. This certainly seems the most appropriate resting place for these mementoes of General Washington, which, as you justly remark, "the whole country has an interest in preserving."

Their transfer has been ordered, and Hon. Caleb Lyon has consented to superintend their transit to the custody provided by your patriotic liberality.

I am, sir, with great respect, your obedient servant,

S. WILLIAMS,
Assistant Adjutant General.

Hon. C. B. SMITH,
Secretary of the Interior.

Official copy:

E. D. TOWNSEND,
Adjutant General.

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE, *January* 29, 1870.

All this correspondence was then handed to Hon. J. D. Cox, Secretary of the Interior, with request for such further information touching the facts therein stated as could be afforded by his department. Mr. Secretary Cox referred the same to Hon. S. S. Fisher, Commissioner of Patents, with the following official indorsement:

FEBRUARY 3, 1870.

At the verbal request of Hon. M. C. KERR, of the House of Representatives, these papers are referred to the Commissioner of Patents, with request that he return the same with a report as to the articles named within, which are now in the Patent Office, and also what, if any, have been removed, and what action in regard to the same may have been taken by public authorities or individuals.

J. D. COX, *Secretary.*

In answer thereto the Commissioner of Patents replied as follows:

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE,
February 4, 1870.

Respectfully forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior.

The articles named within are all in the Patent Office at the present time, with others of like character. No action, so far as can be ascertained, has been taken with reference to them, other than that which appears in the within papers.

I should be glad if these and other Washington relics could be removed to the Smithsonian Institute, or some other place of safe-keeping, as the room is wanted for the models.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

SAM'L S. FISHER, *Commissioner.*

In returning to the committee the correspondence with these indorsements, Mr. Secretary Cox sent the following letter:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, D. C., February 9, 1870.

SIR: I return herewith the papers respecting the Washington relics, which you left with me on the 3d instant, and have the honor to refer you to the indorsements thereon.

The statement of the Commissioner of Patents communicates all that is known on the subject in this department, and expresses his wishes with regard to the custody of the articles.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. D. COX, *Secretary.*

Hon. M. C. KERR,
House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.

This correspondence, taken together, appears to contain all attainable official or record information concerning the relics, and it discloses very clearly the genuineness of the relics, the manner in which they came into the custody of the government, from whose possession they were taken, and whose property they were when so properly taken charge of by General McDowell.

On the advice of her friends, during the late administration, under date of February 10, 1869, Mrs. Lee, from Lexington, Virginia, addressed the following request to the President:

Mr. PRESIDENT: Encouraged by your kind attention to a former application, and prompted by my friend, Captain May, I now venture to request that you will direct all the articles taken from Arlington and deposited in the Patent Office to be restored. They are relics from Mount Vernon, bequeathed to me by my father, and consequently of great value and interest to his family.

Very respectfully,

MARY CUSTIS LEE.

His Excellency ANDREW JOHNSON,
President of the United States.

This letter was directed under cover to Captain May, and by him placed in the hands of Mr. Secretary Browning, who said in his testimony before a former committee of this house, that he delivered it to the President in full cabinet meeting, and, upon being read, every member of the cabinet agreed that the request of Mrs. Lee should be complied with and it was so ordered. Before the transfer was effected an inquiry was ordered by this House in the last Congress, and all further proceedings ceased.

The investigation by that committee elicited no facts inconsistent with what is above indicated.

These articles were the property of Mrs. Lee for her natural life, to be transmitted as heirlooms to her posterity. Mrs. Lee is the daughter and only child of George Washington Parke Custis, who was the grandson of Mrs. Martha Custis, afterward Martha Washington, wife of the "Father of his Country." She became possessed of Arlington House and estate under her father's will. That estate and these relics belonged to Mrs. Lee and not to her husband, General R. E. Lee. The federal government never attempted by any legal proceedings to divest her title. The title appears, therefore, to be still in her alone. In the judgment of your committee the *possession* ought to be transferred to her.

○

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 011 838 153 1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 011 838 153 1